

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

There are certain facts in our recent experience on which we cannot reflect too often since they have a deep religious meaning. They have already been mentioned in the C. N.-L., but let us recall them and set them down side by side.

(1) We have experienced as a nation a miraculous deliverance at Dunkirk and in the recovery which followed on it. A few weeks ago informed military opinion in America and other countries was convinced that this country was without a chance; it is now persuaded that we shall win through.

(2) We have discovered in the hour of crisis that to a greater degree than we could have dared to hope we are a united people. Fifth Column elements have not been absent, but they have been quite unable to impair our national solidarity. In spite of the reality of the class struggle, in spite of social injustices, in spite of the materialism that has infected our life and undermined spiritual values, we know that the bonds which unite us are standing the strain. It would be the gravest mistake to exaggerate this solidarity. It is precarious and far from perfect. The strain is increasing and the unity may break. But we have something on which, if we are wise, we may build.

(3) All classes of the population in every kind of emergency and under every variety of test have exhibited an unsuspected strength and nobility of character.

These facts have a profound religious significance. In these experiences we are the recipients of God's grace and mercy. It follows from this, first that, as St. Paul puts it, the riches of God's goodness, His forbearance and longsuffering, should lead us to *repentance*. We must break with the materialism and self-seeking that but for the saving grace of God might have been our undoing. We must put an end to the social injustices and divisions which might have disrupted our society, and mercifully have not. And secondly, we must do this with *hope*. As a nation delivered thus far, and we may trust eventually, from destruction and annihilation, we must dedicate ourselves to the task of creating, in contrast with the pagan and atheistic systems of to-day, and in contrast equally with our own past, a society based on spiritual values, providing substantial security and genuine opportunity for all its members. To quote St. Paul again, we must work out our own salvation *because* it is God who is working in us. There is a difference of worlds between a pretentious attempt to impose our own values on reality and humble co-operation with a Power that in preserving us has called us to fulfil an appointed task.

(4) This brings us to a fourth fact that is fundamental to an understanding of the religious situation. It is that people are doing all sorts of wonderful things without knowing that they are doing anything remarkable. That is as it should be. It is not they, but a grace of which they are unaware working in them. That is akin to the central Christian experience — "not I, but Christ liveth in me."

What is happening is well described in the *New English Weekly*: "England still fights this war in the spirit of magnificent obstinacy, as unable as unwilling to propound her cause as a creative destiny, a concrete or positive mission, but only as a defence of human right against a grandiose and inhuman heresy. It is like a yokel who may not quite understand it,

but he don't hold with it, it ain't right. Maybe that is the destiny for which this great people must now endure its greatest suffering—merely to make a proud wrong impossible."

Be it so. It is a better and bigger thing to be the unknowing agents of God's high purpose than to preen ourselves with our clever schemes and too easy intellectual solutions. None the less, it is the Christian faith that God calls men to be His sons, to share in His purposes and to love Him with the mind as well as with the heart. It is right, therefore, that we should pray with all earnestness that there may be granted to our people a growing *understanding* of the ends for which we must work, if we are to fulfil the purpose for which we are being saved from destruction.

A NEW C.N.-L. GROUP

On the initiative of the Master of Balliol and T. R. Milford, the members of the C.N.-L in Oxford were invited to meet. About a hundred and fifty invitations were sent out, and an attendance of perhaps forty was expected; about a hundred came. It was decided that the group should continue to meet monthly and that two main sub-groups should be formed. One of these will undertake a theological project, studying the question in what sense the things that are happening to us are being done to us by *God*, and in what sense our reaction to them is our response to Him. The other group will deal with the widely felt need of a personal commitment or rule of life. Consideration is also being given to various forms of group action, such as help to aliens, domestic arrangements and communal meals, hospitality to soldiers and other sojourners, community service in the out-lying housing estates, and discussion by parents of their attitude to present class distinctions in education. We look forward to receiving much help from this active group at Oxford both in criticism of the News-Letter and in positive contribution and example.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS

News-Letter No. 52, completing our first year, will be published on October 23rd. With this issue 2,500 subscriptions will terminate, sent by those who had sufficient faith in the News-Letter to subscribe for a whole year before, or immediately after, the publication of the first issue. Experience leads us to believe that the proportion of renewals will be high, and we have to provide for the extra technical and secretarial work involved in reminding, re-coding and re-indexing under the disorganised conditions in which we are at present carrying on our work. The extra pressure will continue for some time, since more than 2,000 further renewals fall due within the following six weeks.

It will help us greatly if those of you who know that your subscription is nearly due, and intend to renew it, will do so ahead of time. Some of the original members have already done this and their thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated by all concerned with the production of the News-Letter. If you do not remember when your subscription ends a renewal reminder will reach you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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BRITAIN AND AMERICA

By WILLIAM PATON

This paper is written to express and defend the view that very much depends for the whole world upon the existence of a close understanding between the United States and Great Britain, and to suggest some of the obstacles which stand in the way. Nearly everything in it comes out of recent discussions in the United States with Americans; in so short an article it is impossible not to be somewhat dogmatic, but for all that is said from the American point of view a great deal of evidence could be quoted.

CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA

Let us look, first, at the question of Anglo-American understanding from the point of view of the Church and its task in the world. The United States have come to occupy a position of the highest importance in the total Church life of the world. Probably no modern nation which has been thoroughly impregnated with the spirit of Western civilisation, both for good and for evil, has so large a proportion of its citizens in actual membership of some branch of the Christian Church. In a previous Supplement I called attention to the remarkable fact that whereas at the time of the Revolution not more than 5 per cent. of the population of the American colonies professed membership in any church, to-day not less than 50 per cent. do so, and this notwithstanding the tremendous growth of population and the steady occupation of the vast continental area of the States. Numbers, it will be said, are not everything. But they are not to be brushed aside, and at the very least they represent the fact of contact between organised Christianity and the mass of the people.

WORLD-WIDE SERVICE

It is in harmony with this that we find the Americans playing so large a part in

the field of missionary work. Roughly speaking, they are responsible for 60 per cent. of Protestant, or non-Roman, missions in the world. I cannot give an exact figure for their share in the missions of the Roman Church, but it is well known that one of the major facts in the missionary development of that Church since the last war is the greatly increased share taken in it by the Catholics of America, both in service and in gifts.

It is a remarkable fact that a country still, by European standards, sparsely inhabited and therefore burdened with the peculiar problems which the Church has to face in a great and growing community, should show so real a concern for the work of the universal Church. It might so easily have been otherwise. The weaker Protestant churches on the continent of Europe nearly all owe a great deal to the continuing generosity of America. Eastern Orthodoxy is comparatively weak in the United States (though more numerous and varied than is commonly understood), but alien as is the Orthodox type of religion to the prevailing American strains, there are not a few Americans, particularly some who have been identified with the Y.M.C.A., who have a deep knowledge of Orthodoxy and enjoy the confidence of Orthodox leaders in a high degree.

From the very beginning of the plans for forming a World Council of Churches Americans took a large share, and now that under war conditions a heavier burden in both organisation and support has fallen to them, they have shouldered it eagerly and generously. No one can live for any time with the men and women who bear the main burdens of responsibility in American Christianity without recognising their deep sense of need and obligation towards the wider Church throughout the world.

American churches of every confession have joined the World Council, including both Lutheran and Reformed and Orthodox. Studies in the future of international order are being carried on not only by native American scholars but by some of those brilliant exiles of European nations—Czech, German, Russian and others—who have received hospitality at the hands of American Christians and American institutions. The News-Letter has told something of the wonderfully generous efforts now being put forth by the American mission boards to help the stranded continental missions. At the bottom of all this there is not only the natural generosity of a very generous people to those in distress, but the conviction that it is demanded of them by their own commitment as Christians and as churchmen to their fellow Christians and churchmen everywhere.

AMERICAN BELIEF IN LIBERTY

If, in the second place, we turn to the question of the American contribution to the common life of the world, the closeness of Anglo-American friendship becomes not less important. Americans claim, and with justice, that their civilisation is based upon Christianity. With them, as with us, there was a coalescence of religious and philosophical ideas in the framing of their conception of liberty; with them, as with us, there are many who forget how impossible it is to maintain the ideals of human worth apart from a belief in God. But into the American conception of freedom—and it is a conception to which the whole nation would swear allegiance—there has entered from the beginning a profoundly Christian note. Freedom of religious life and profession has always been prominent in every American declaration of national policy, and it is entirely characteristic that it should in recent months have been repeatedly asserted by President Roosevelt in his guarded statements of the American ideal as he set it over against that of the totalitarian States. Most Americans feel, and rightly, that they are socially more democratic than we are; most British visitors to America feel, again I think rightly, that we are politically more truly democratic than

they. We are still largely an aristocratic society, but we know better what absolute popular control of government means; they are from the British view-point unduly fettered by a written constitution, but they give the common man a priceless sense of his status. We believe alike in the freedom of all nations, great and small; if we are "imperialist," as they often tell us, they have their financial power of domination, and both peoples alike are in the last resort very highly susceptible to the moral criticisms that can be made of the use to which they put their vast powers.

ANGLO-AMERICAN CO-OPERATION

It is not, I think, an argument out of place in the Christian News-Letter that in the future organisation of the world these two nations, if they can think and see and act together, can play a decisive part. American and British newspapers are full of discussions about destroyers and aeroplanes, but I venture to urge that most important of all is the need for a steady increase of common thinking about the future of the world order. British thinkers have mainly based their ideas upon the permanence of the Anglo-French accord; now that France is for the moment laid low, where is there in all the world that we can look for friends who share our own broad outlook upon human freedom and can unite to those ideas the needful power?

Propaganda has perhaps a worse name in the United States than anywhere else in the world, and they fear most the propaganda of those with whom they are most allied in sympathy. It is for this reason that the question of a fuller statement of British aims for the future of Europe and the world must be publicly faced so soon as events allow, and must be privately faced now by all who have the right and competence to deal with them. To put the matter very crudely, if Americans think that they are being wheedled into some sort of alliance in the interests of an unchanged (and to them dubious) British imperial policy, their answer is absolutely certain. If there should come about in these next weeks and months a greater clarifying of

our "aims," and it should become evident that the two peoples are genuinely concerned to achieve the same great ends and look to the same manner of life among the nation, the greatest good may flow.

There is an aspect of this matter which ought to draw us very close together. Both peoples are in the process of discovering how to unite freedom with national and international planning. (In one sense that is what the November election in U.S.A. will turn upon.) Both have enjoyed to the full the prosperity which has come from international trade, and in the United States behind the high tariff walls the great industrialists and financiers have enjoyed a measure of freedom and authority which has with us long been tempered by legislation. Both of us have to face the crucial test of our civilisation, can we give men work and the sense of being needed? For them the gradual filling up of the country and the drastic limitation of immigration, which meant cheap unorganised labour; for us the rise of an ever-keener world competition for markets has meant that special conditions which averted unemployment have passed away, not to return. If we are more than the "pluto-democracies" of the Goebbels vision, and if we have an alternative to the Nazi scheme for putting the world to work, which yet holds within it the human values which the other repudiates, now is our time to show it.

SOME OBSTACLES

What, then, are the obstacles to a closer Anglo-American understanding? If one were writing for Americans it might be proper to try to suggest those matters which we find irksome and unpleasant. But the bulk of those who will read this are British, and I shall not waste time in selecting from among our prejudices those most worthy of mention. It is all the more necessary to turn the searchlight upon ourselves, because the irritations which we cause to the Americans matter more than those which they cause to us. Perhaps it is easier for a British observer to try to state something of what Americans feel than for an American to do it, especially at the present moment when, whatever may have been the case in

recent months, there has been aroused in the States a passion of concern about us.

I am sure that a considerable part of our offence is just that we are not sufficiently interested. It is not only that we convey to Americans, as indeed we do, all too often, to the Dominions, that "effortless consciousness of superiority" usually associated with one British institution. It is more serious than that. We do not take trouble to know how good their accomplishment is, in learning, in letters, in science, and not least in education. I should not mention this point were I not certain that behind the unshakable courtesy of the educated American, even among many who are closest to us in sympathy and spirit, there is a silent resentment at the British (and, of course, still more the marked Continental) refusal to take seriously the achievements and resources of America in the things of the mind.

Another cause of difference is the sentiment of insularity deeply rooted in the American consciousness. (Of course, the "island" in question is a big one!). To quote my friend, Professor Van Dusen, "it is at once a historic tradition, a psychological inevitability, and a dictate of self-interest." This is not only a factor of great importance whenever America faces the possibility of "involvement" in war outside the Americas; it governs the national temper. So many Americans, or their fathers before them, left Europe because they wanted to get away from it, and because they conceived of America as a land where a new kind of experiment in living was to be worked out, and so many of them have been satisfied with the results, that "the American way" has become something precious, to be preserved at all costs. They are proud of such things as their immense influence upon the education of China, or of the international influence of such great institutions as the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations. But they have not the disposition to be overmuch entangled with other countries, whereas we, island people as we are, have been so long entangled with the whole world that we do not understand those who look askance at such entanglement. This is even true in matters of trade. American foreign trade is in total very large, but it is of course

a far smaller fraction of the national trade than is the case with us. This has its bearing upon the national attitude to any comprehensive international commitment, as in a League of Nations. It seems to us obvious that international trade must benefit so largely from international order that it is worth while to make sacrifices for it; to Americans international trade, though important, matters less.

Another profound difference lies in the sphere of church life. All the great groups of Christian believers are well represented in the United States. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest, and it is a well-known fact that Rome in America has acquired characteristics in some degree different from those of continental Romanism. Lutherans, Reformed as well as Orthodox, carry on the different continental traditions; the great English "free" churches such as the Methodist and Baptist have grown to immense size, and the Anglicanism of England and the Presbyterianism of Scotland and Northern Ireland are powerfully represented. But there is no state church, and there is a profound dislike and suspicion of the idea of religious establishment. The controversy that has raged round the appointment of Mr. Myron Taylor as personal delegate of President Roosevelt to the Vatican shows how deep is the attachment to the principle of the separation of Church and State.

Moreover, for historical reasons into which it is not possible here to enter, Protestant Christianity in America (which is overwhelmingly the largest part) is much more committed to the conviction that Christian ideas can be incorporated in the legislative structure and corporate life of the state than is the case with almost any European group. Hence the religious support for prohibition; hence the religious fervour with which President Wilson's ideas of a League of Nations were first accepted;

hence also the vague isolationist-pacifism which was so powerful in America until yesterday. The criticisms which continental thinkers have levelled at the "American social gospel" are well known, and they are echoed in America (see Reinhold Niebuhr *passim*). But it is essential that the depth and range of this type of religious thinking in America should be appreciated if there is to be a real rapport between the Christianity of America and that of Europe.

Readers of Professor Clarke's Christian News-Letter book *Education for Social Change* will remember his important words about the American emphasis in education and the danger of ignorance and misunderstanding on our part about it. Certainly no one who has seen anything of the best negro education in the United States, or of the application of those methods to missionary education in many countries, will fall into the error of imagining that there is nothing for us to learn there.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE CHURCHES

In conclusion, I wish to urge most earnestly that if there is on general grounds a very great need for the two nations to understand one another better at this time, then the place to be taken in this work of mediation by the churches ought to be very great indeed. We begin with a real unity, something much more important than the rather over-regarded "English-speaking" unity. On the basis of that unity it should be possible for the outstanding tasks that confront us alike to be analysed and undertaken, and the differences that separate us to be thoroughly examined. The tremendous course of world events has thrown the Christians of the two peoples into a situation wherein the experience they already have of one another can be used for the good of the whole world and for the enrichment of the whole Church.